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Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Urges Boaters to Beware of Non-Native Hitch Hikers ***Invasive species can travel from one body of water to the next, threatening native ecosystems***

BOSTON – Boaters on Massachusetts waterways are being asked by state environmental officials to make sure they aren't giving non-native aquatic plants or animals a free ride.

The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) of the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game warns that invasive aquatic species are easily transported between water bodies by boats, motors, trailers, fishing equipment, anchors, bait buckets, live wells- where fishermen store and preserve their catch until they reach shore - diving gear, and other aquatic equipment.

These hitchhikers can wreak havoc in lakes and ponds by choking waterways with explosive growth; fouling intake and discharge structures, lowering lakefront property values; and impeding boating, swimming and fishing. Non-native species can also reduce biodiversity by crowding out native fish, insects, animals and plants. Eradicating these invasive organisms is nearly impossible once they are established in a body of water.

"The spread of aquatic exotic species is a serious threat to the ecology of our rivers, streams, and lakes, and we appreciate boaters' efforts to stop the spread of invasive species," said Mary Griffin, Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game. "Our department's Office of Fishing and Boating Access manages more than 170 boating access sites on Massachusetts rivers and ponds, and we post signs at these sites to educate the public about what they should do to prevent the spread of these invasive species."

To head off a potential invasive problem before it takes hold in Massachusetts, DCR's Lakes and Ponds Program is about to launch a Zebra and Quagga Mussel Education, Monitoring, and Outreach Program. At first, the focus will be on bodies of water in western Massachusetts where the water chemistry is most conducive to supporting a breeding population of zebras or quaggas.

Currently, there are no known infestations of zebra mussels in Massachusetts, according to DCR. But experts say boaters should be aware that the species – native to the Caspian Sea waters of Asia – has been found in nearby states such as Vermont, New York and Connecticut. Although small, the mussels spread rapidly, clogging boat motors, damaging power plants and taking over native freshwater mussel habitat. Once zebra mussels have arrived in a body of water, there are no known ways to control them.

Boaters and others can help prevent the spread of invasive non-native plants and other organisms by:

- Hand-removing all materials (plant or animal) from equipment and disposing of it far away from the water. Special attention should be paid to the bunks or rollers where the boat is seated on the trailer, as well as the trailer hitch.
- Wash and dry all equipment for 72 hours before reuse. Hose off the boat, diving gear and trailer.
- Drain and flush the engine cooling system and live wells, bait buckets and the buoyancy control device from diving equipment that has been in contact with a water body.
- Join the Weed Watchers! The DCR Lakes and Ponds program is looking for anglers, boaters, lake and pond association members and other water users to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasives. Receive hands-on-training in plant identification, a Guide to Aquatic Invasive Species and other helpful publications. For information about the [Weed Watchers program](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/waterSupply/lakepond/weedwatch.htm), visit www.mass.gov/dcr/waterSupply/lakepond/weedwatch.htm.

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